2

AWAKENINGS

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place—what are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?

~ Psalm 8

There is something which is far greater than my will to believe. Namely, God's will that I believe.

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

I cannot escape Thy Scrutiny!
I would not escape Thy Love!

~ Howard Thurman

Late one afternoon in the midst of summer vacation near Lake Michigan, my family and some close friends packed a picnic and drove north to arrive at Sturgeon Bay just before sunset. As we settled onto the beach and began to take in the moment, our adopted son

Henry, author's son, at Sturgeon Bay, Michigan. Photo by author.

Henry, then two and a half years old, looked up from his food to catch the red-orange sun as it fell toward the water. He ambled down to the surf, and after a few minutes playing at the water's edge, noticed the swirls of flaming light in the surf at his feet. Mesmerized, he turned his body and slowly raised his head, following the light as it danced across the luminous bay and out to the shimmering boundary where the crimson sun and purpling sky met the water.

The rest of us sat on our beach blankets, mouths agape, watching the scene unfold. As the sun touched the water Henry raised both hands to the sky, one of them still clutching his sippy cup, and then—I'm not making this up—he began to chant and sing and sway from side to side. For what seemed like the next ten minutes, the child sang the sun into the water.

What in God's name was he singing? What compelled this child, who cannot stand still for 30 seconds, to remain fixed in that spot and sing with nonsensical abandon to the surf and sky?

Anyone watching might have reasonably concluded it was nothing, an explosion of random neurons, a flurry of toddler gibberish. I'm not so sure. Perhaps he was singing the forgotten mother tongue, the language of wonder and radical amazement, before he has a chance to grow up and forget. Maybe he was chanting his plain ecstasy before we, with our adult sophistication and sober "reality checks," have a chance to teach such music out of him!

In the Womb of Something More

The great African American theologian and mystic Howard Thurman recalled a similar memory from his boyhood in Florida, walking on the beach at night "in the quiet stillness,"

> when the murmur of the ocean is stilled and the tides move stealthily along the shore. I held my breath against the night and watched the stars etch their brightness on the face of the darkened canopy of the heavens. I had the sense that all things, the sand, the sea, the stars, the night, and I were one lung through which all of life breathed. Not only was I aware of a vast rhythm enveloping all, but I was a part of it and it was a part of me.[1]

Do such moments teach us anything, *really*, about reality? In a word, are they trustworthy?

There are certain gifts and realms of meaning that, no matter my relative power or privileged status in society, I cannot give to any person, impose upon them, or ever steal away. One of these gifts is the encounter with the mystery and wonder of Life itself and with the greatest of all mysteries we name God. For Thurman the experience of the sheer *gratuitousness* of life itself—unexpected, unearned, simply given—is the pulsing womb from which all other concerns ebb and flow, inclusive of social and political concerns. Here the individual stands "face to face with something which is so much more, and so much more inclusive, than all of his awareness of himself that for him, *in the moment*, there are no questions. Without asking, somehow he knows." Knows what? The reality that we and all things in the universe are, in fact, "one lung" through which all of life breathes is not new, says Thurman; "The thing that is new is the *realization*. And this is of profound importance."[2]

Indeed this palpable sense of the unity of oneself and of all things in God is so transforming that it leads the biblical psalmist and wisdom writers to surmise that in the human race there is an uncreated element, an eternal dimension.[3] Herein lay the disarming paradox of religious experience. On the one hand, the realization of the One in the Many, the Many in the One, feels like something altogether new: it is "so much more, and so much more inclusive" than our default mode of consciousness, a Cartesian mode of experience which divides the world into Subjects and Objects, Me and You, and most ominously, Us and Them. On the other hand, in coming to an awareness of the whole—and of God, not as another object or separate being out there but as the One in whom we live and move and have our being—the person comes into possession, says Thurman, "of what he has known as being true all along."[4] It is like coming home to where we have never been before.

We reach feebly for language to utter such an insight: "sometimes it is called an encounter; sometimes, a confrontation; and sometimes, a sense of Presence."[5] Psychologists, religious philosophers, and skeptics alike have tried to classify, tame, and sometimes dismiss such experiences: they are "peak moments," probably linked to the "ecology of imagination in childhood."[6] In truth, says Thurman, the

experience of God is "beyond or inclusive of" all such descriptive terms and attempts at rational, analytic control. The mind has to expand its palette through poetry, psalms, parables, and chant. The mark of God is written eternally on our forehead, says Thurman, citing the book of Job. God's language of desire, what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel calls the "forgotten mother tongue,"[7] is written eternally in our hearts.

So what? Even granting the unmistakable fact that human societies and cultures always and everywhere have reflected something of the religious element, what can religious or mystical experience have to do with the race problem or any practical social and ethical question in society? For Thurman, the realization of God has everything to do with the race question. He writes:

> In the last analysis the mood of reverence that should characterize all man's dealings with each other finds its basis [in the experience of God]. The demand to treat all human beings as ends in themselves, or the moral imperative that issues in respect for personality, finds its profound inspiration here. To deal with men on any other basis, to treat them as if there were not vibrant and vital in each one the very life of the very God, is the great blasphemy; it is the judgment that is leveled with such relentless severity on modern man.[8]

Would that people today in the public square, not least religious folks, could approach one another with something of this "mood of reverence" that issues from the realization that everyone, without exception, pulses "vibrant and vital" with "the very life of the very God." It is no wonder Thurman calls the realization of God "the most daring and revolutionary concept" known to the human race: specifically, "that God is not only the creative mind and spirit at the core of the universe but that [God] . . . is love." Such a conclusion, Thurman grants, cannot be arrived at "by mere or sheer rational processes. This is the great disclosure: that there is at the heart of life a Heart."[9]

Nowhere are Thurman's writings more powerful or moving than where he writes of Jesus of Nazareth as the lens for this great disclosure of the Heart—Jesus, who had "what seems to me to have been a fundamental and searching—almost devastating—experience of God."[10]

> To Jesus, God breathed through all that is. The sparrow overcome by sudden death in its evening flight; the lily blossoming on the rocky hillside; the grass of the field and the garden path . . . ; the madman in chains or wandering among the barren rocks in the wastelands; the little baby in his mother's arms; the strutting arrogance of the Roman Legion; the brazen queries of the craven tax collector; the children at play or the old men quibbling in the market place; the august Sanhedrin fighting for its life amidst the impudences of Empire; the fear-voiced utterance of the prophets who remembered—to Jesus, God breathed through all that is.[11]

Repeatedly Thurman draws our attention to how Jesus prayed, how often Jesus prayed, and how the whole of Jesus' life *was* a continuous prayer.

> The time most precious for him was at close of day. This was the time for the long breath, when all the fragments left by the commonplace, when all the little hurts and the big aches could be absorbed, and the mind could be freed of the immediate demand, when voices that had been quieted by the long day's work could once more be heard, where there could be the deep sharing of the innermost secrets and the laying bare of the heart and mind. Yes, the time most precious for him was at close of day.[12]

And repeatedly Thurman counsels us to do as Jesus did, to "wait in the quietness for some centering moment that will redefine, reshape, and refocus our lives."[13]

Thurman acknowledges that cultivating a life of prayer and "the art of being still" might seem to be a luxury "while the world around is so sick and weary and desperate." Yet he compares our situation—and specifically, the terrible challenges facing African Americans in the decade of the 1950s—with the prodigal son, who could not reconcile the "warring parts" of his existence until he recognized the contradictions of his situation and came home to his father's house.

> It is as if he saw into himself, beyond all his fragmentation, conflicts, and divisiveness, and recognized his true self. The experience of the prodigal son is underscored in the religious

> experience of the race—when he came to himself, he came to his father's house and dwelling place. The experience of God reconciles all the warring parts that are ultimately involved in the life of every man as against whatever keeps alive the conflict, and its work is healing and ever redemptive. Therefore there is laid upon the individual the need to keep the way open so that he and his Father may have free and easy access to each other. Such is the ethical imperative of religious experience.[14]

For Thurman, the encounter with God is a coming home to one's true self, where we can love and *allow ourselves to be loved* even with all of our inner fragmentation, conflicts, and divisiveness. This is why prayer is not peripheral but essential to the "discipline of reconciliation" on all sides of the color line. It is not a new (or fourth) entry point into the conversation about race, but for people of faith its very source and wellspring. *O love of God, love of God, where would we be without Thee? Where?*[15]

Again there are certain gifts and realms of meaning such as the encounter with God's love which I cannot give to any person, impose, or take away. But I qualify: Consider how often God can and does give such gifts through us, through our embodied presence, and through the communities of family, work, and faith to which we belong. My son Henry's reverie before the sunset was not mine to give. And yet our bringing him to that place of beauty, our sharing it with him, opened up a circle in time and space for the ordinary miracle that unfolded and which so unexpectedly gifted us. Indeed the gift that the Christian tradition calls grace comes in so many unpredictable, spontaneous, and hidden ways: in our awe before the beauty of nature; in kind gestures passed between a parent and child, between friends, or colleagues at work; in "the long breath" and "deep sharing" between spouses or lovers at the close of the day. But torn from that sense of wonder, torn from the art of silence and stillness, torn from the discipline of exposure and surrender to the One who breathes through all that is, what hope can we have for reconciling our fragmented selves, much less for making peace with other persons and communities in the public square?

To say it more darkly, growing in the awareness of God helps us to guard against what Thurman calls the "constant threat of error"

that would turn my limited experience and perspective, or that of my social identity group, into a dangerous idol or prison.[16] The tensions and contradictions of life as I see and feel them from within the womb of my social group are not, and must not be, the final word or arbiter of truth. Against the constant temptation to take refuge in the closed circle of self, blood, race, party, religion, or nation, knowledge of God cultivates humility and a profoundly open, "many-sided" awareness. Thurman writes:

> There is a spirit in man and in the world working always against the thing that destroys and lays waste. Always he must know that the contradictions of life are not final or ultimate; he must distinguish between failure and a many-sided awareness so that he will not mistake conformity for harmony, uniformity for synthesis. He will know that for all men to be alike is the death of life in man, and yet perceive harmony that transcends all diversities and in which diversity finds its richness and significance.[17]

To paraphrase the great Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, left to our own manner of measuring things we human beings and communities are "too ambiguous" to understand ourselves unless our judgments are rooted in a faith that we are "comprehended from beyond the ambiguities" of our own understanding.[18] As Thurman puts it, no community can "feed for long on itself; it can only flourish where always the boundaries are giving way to the coming of others from beyond them—unknown and undiscovered brothers."[19] Sometimes it is the ineffable God who grasps us "from beyond" ourselves; sometimes it is nature; sometimes it is the ineffable human *other*: a beloved, a child, a neighbor, our enemy. In every case the question is, are we willing to let the circle of familiarity be broken open, and the boundaries give way to the coming of the Lord?

To feel ourselves come home into God's wide-open love is to realize that there are many rooms in this house, far more than can be seen or imagined inside rigidly self-enclosed walls of religious, political, racial, gender, or class identity. This is not to render those identities superfluous, self-serving, or false; it is to see them, however, as partial and contingent to the one great fellowship and gift in which we all—inclusive of the natural world—live, move, and have our

being. Like the parables of Jesus, revelation has a dialectical character. The light of God's scandalously inclusive love and creativity throws into sharp relief every shadowland and dark prison cell where persons, groups, and nations are turned in upon themselves, or, like the older son in Jesus' parable, turned outward in resentment and animosity against others, grasping aggressively for "our share" and more of society's or the earth's gifts. Indeed, from a biblical perspective our alienation from self, God, and others is bound up from the very beginning with our alienation from the earth, flowers, mountains, fields, animals, trees and waters. Why? Because, like a single lung, God breathes in and through all things. We lose touch with this fundamental insight to our great peril.[20]

At the end of the day, Thurman seems to ask: *Whose are we?* In whom do we place our ultimate trust? The source of life is God, who saturates all things in a sea of reverence. Can we see it? And can we afford "while the world around is so sick and weary and desperate" to bind our lives to such a contemplative foundation? Can we afford not to? "Do not shrink from moving confidently out into the choppy seas. Wade in the water, because God is troubling the water."[21]

The Terror of the Closed Circle

With Thurman I have suggested that for people of faith the realization of God is not simply one of many possible entry points into the conversation about race so much as it is the very source and wellspring. It is the reason for our hope (see 1 Pet 3:15) when we consider the many and steep obstacles that lay ahead. The encounter with the God of Jesus, who breathes in all things, transforms the way believers see, judge, and respond to everything—or ought to—right? If Thurman is correct about the "ethical imperative of religious experience," then how to explain the utter failure of so many self-identified religious people to live in the house of love? How to explain, for example, the refusal of white Catholics, historically, to share the same sanctuary and the one eucharistic body and blood of Jesus with black Catholics?[22] How to explain the regular spectacle of lynching in the American south, where whole communities of "good Christian folks" could imagine, as a kind of ritual entertainment, turning magnolias into lynching trees? Can anything but exorbitant

self-concern and human-centered disdain for God and God's gratuitous love explain the horrors of man's inhumanity to man or the ongoing desecration of nature?

During an interview some years ago, black Catholic theologian and Dominican Sister M. Shawn Copeland recalled the first time she became aware of these kinds of painful questions. She was twelve years old, learning about the Holocaust during summer school. "It struck me quite forcibly," she said, "that people who have a great disregard for human life, if they can stigmatize you and identify you and if they are in charge, they can make laws which can eradicate you."[23] It would not be a stretch to measure the whole of Copeland's remarkable theological career in view of this early, troublesome awakening. If theology asks not only "Who is God?" but also, and intimately related, "Who is the human person?" Copeland answers with an image borrowed from Thomas Merton: We are "a body of broken bones."[24]

I turn to Copeland's thought here as a counterpoint to Thurman's. Though they do so from distinct confessions and different emphases from within the Christian tradition, both seek to illumine reality beyond the closed circle, and both find hope for the disinherited persons of society in the person of Christ. Above all, Copeland seeks to unmask the *thought systems* that allow for the stigmatizing, identifying, and eradicating of whole groups of persons—persons deemed different, inferior, dangerous to society. For her the premier concern of Christian theology today must be the defense of the vulnerable not only from invisibility in society but from evils that render them *all-too-visible* in the body public, evils such as racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. By diagnosing these crippling ailments—by telling the truth—theology serves the body's healing and anticipates its future restoration in "the mystical body of Christ."[25]

One of the hallmarks of Copeland's theology is the telling of stories, narratives that serve to keep our thinking about God tethered to concrete reality. In an address to her colleagues in the Catholic Theological Society of America, Copeland relates the story of Fatima Yusif, a twenty-eight-year-old Somali immigrant in Italy, as it appeared in the *Times* of London:

> The plight of a Somali woman who gave birth unassisted beside a road in Southern Italy as a crowd stood by and jeered

> prompted telephone calls yesterday of solidarity and job offers. . . . "I will remember those faces as long as I live," Ms. Yusif, who was born in Mogadishu, told *Corriere della Sera* as she recovered in the hospital. "They were passing by, they would stop and linger as if they were at the cinema careful not to miss any of the show. There was a boy who sniggering, said, 'Look what the negress is doing.'"[26]

While "any number of current newspaper or historical accounts" might have been selected for analysis, the story of Ms. Yusif, suggests Copeland, serves as a particularly dramatic *anthropological signifier*: "it captures graphically what it means to be an exploited, despised, poor woman of color."[27]

> As black, female human being, Fatima Yusif is *thrown* into a white world. This white world both makes her race and her body visible in order to despise and renders her humanity invisible in order to peer, to gaze. . . . On the grounds of naive racist empiricism, she is, can only be, 'the negress.'. . . What they see is generated by a pornographic gaze: there is no human person, no mother, only an exotic object to be watched.[28]

The experience of Ms. Yusif points to the everyday quality of racism, its palpable presence, what Latina theologians call *lo cotidiano*. In the toxic atmosphere of white racism, to be a poor black or brown woman is to feel one's embodiment as a problem; it is to be exposed "pornographically" at every moment. Indeed, in an earlier essay Copeland explains why biological denotation is so problematic in a racist milieu: "the difference is inescapable, irrevocable, and visible in the very flesh."[29] "Women of color," she writes, "are *overdetermined* in their flesh."[30]

For someone like me who has never experienced anything remotely akin to the trauma of Ms. Yusif it may be difficult to comprehend what Copeland can mean by "overdetermined in the flesh." The striking description points to the myriad ways racial formation permeates not only naked acts of racism but also the fabric of everyday experience, even what seems (for whites) to be the most innocuous of circumstances. "The most mundane as well as the most

significant tasks and engagements are racially charged—grocery shopping, banking, registering for school, inquiring about church membership, using public transportation, hailing a taxicab, even celebrating the Eucharist or seeking a spiritual director. We *see* race," argues Copeland. "We see and we interpret."[31]

The "we" here is significant. Racial formation initiates Americans into a well-rehearsed game of survival, a social tap dance in which *everyone* has a circumscribed role. "[We] women and men of color submit ourselves to representations and roles developed for us by whites; we learn and practice compliance and deference, or when the occasion prompts, studied, crafted anger."[32] Returning to the story, Copeland probes the racial bias in the mob of Italian onlookers. The refusal of anyone in the crowd to help Fatima Yusif demonstrates how racism chokes the "natural and spontaneous impulse to help another human being, simply because she (or he) is another human being suffering."[33] At the same time, there are layers of complexity beneath the scene that call for more than simply a self-righteous condemnation of the crowd as racists—the Vatican newspaper, for example, rebuked the bystanders as "not worthy of the word man."[34] While such a rebuke approximates a gesture of sympathy for the victim, it does not account for the hidden dimensions of the story: the bias and cultural decline that had likely poisoned the crowd's view of the other (i.e., African immigrants) long before the injury done to Ms. Yusif.

> It is not unlikely that members of the crowd fear insecurity and loss. In the global economy, even in "first-world" rural towns, it is sometimes difficult to make ends meet. These women and men fear the difference that poor people of color and immigrants represent. . . . The frustration and anger that they cannot express directly to venture capitalists and the affluent is spewed out on a poor immigrant black woman. In every country, corporate downsizing and disemployment leave a remainder—dirty jobs and scapegoats. . . . Fatima Yusif is immigration made flesh.[35]

It is not hard to hear in Copeland's analysis strong parallels with the present political climate of the United States and the animosity frequently directed against those who represent "immigration made

flesh." If, however, we wish *to understand* the persons in the crowd, it is not enough to simply condemn the whole lot with a label, say, "inhuman racist pigs." What is rightly condemned as inhuman is not the persons as such in the crowd but their behavior, their objectifying gaze, their racist speech and tragic failure to help a person in need, all fueled by cultural stereotypes long fermenting in Italian society. While recognizing the humanity of the individuals in the mob is extremely difficult, doing so is crucial, even in the midst of the hateful act, lest we "innocent bystanders" reproduce their error: namely, the error of dehumanizing individuals or a whole group simply by taking a look at the surface of things, and so reacting toward them in kind.

Copeland models an alternative, contemplative way of knowing, which seeks to look on *the whole situation*, including the individuals in the crowd, with eyes of understanding, even empathy—dare I say love? What could have led human beings to act and speak in such a way? What are the social conditions that might be fueling such acts of racism and xenophobia? The high cost of framing things this way, of course, is that it requires me to question myself and the whole social fabric in which I participate and from which I very well may benefit. In short, I can no longer pretend to be simply an innocent bystander.

While this is indeed a costly way of seeing, is it not the case that most of us, in our hearts if not in our heads, already feel ourselves implicated in the grave sins of the world? When we watch the news and contemplate for two seconds the terrible things done by human beings in our own city, our nation, or across our world, we feel not just shock and anger but also shame. Painful as it is, that feeling is a sign of love, and the most basic, beautiful human solidarity. It is the deeply humane intuition, in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, that while "some are guilty, all are responsible." It takes great effort and prayerfulness to live from that empathetic place in the heart, the very Heart of God. It is the opening circle, the "from beyond" that we allow to seize us.

"Everybody Here Is Traumatized"

The scourge of racial and ethnic bias is clearly not unique to the United States. Everywhere we look the human family is turned against

itself. In Israel the Orthodox Jews of Kiryat Arba look down from their houses toward the Arab town of Hebron and say, "Their souls are different," and "One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail."[36] In the former Yugoslavia, Serbian and Croat nationalists engaged in ethnic cleansing even while claiming a Christian aura. In Rwanda, machete-wielding mobs turned into systematic, black-on-black genocide while the white world watched stupidly in horror. The stubbornly entrenched character of racial and ethnic bias is all-too-evident in our world today. Mere moralist rhetoric—"Racists are bad"; "Violence is bad"—can neither diagnose nor heal a threat that is supported by the whole texture and decline of a civilization. Is there hope for social change? Is there hope for persons like Fatima Yusif?

The cost to the victims of racial or ethnic hatred is not only physical violation, though it frequently and tragically is that. Racism wounds the spirit of the victim, damaging not only a person's self-image but also his or her capacity for spontaneous openness and warmth toward others. Who can forget the passage in "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," where Martin Luther King, Jr., recounts the shadow passing over his daughter Yolanda's spirit when he had to tell her why she could not go to the local amusement park? It was the first time she became aware of the meaning of her blackness in a segregated world, and her father was powerless to protect her.[37] Moreover, the reliving of a particular trauma in memory can reduce persons or groups to a self-poisoning condition of *ressentiment*. Rooted in conflict, hurt, or shame, *ressentiment* is a reactive emotional state that "is usually directed against powerful persons or groups in a society . . . [and] which may take the forms of envy, malice, hatred, revenge."[38] Fatima Yusif's defiant cry "to remember those faces as long as I live, both discloses her shame and risks the spoiling of her spirit through *ressentiment*."[39]

"Everybody here is traumatized." I will not soon forget these words of Daniel Rossing, a negotiator called upon by both Israelis and Palestinians to mediate local conflicts, speaking to me and a group of interfaith pilgrims in Jerusalem in the summer of 1998. "Here in Jerusalem," Rossing continued, "people remember not just in decades or centuries but in millennia." Events that happened a thousand years ago still hang in the air like a beautiful scent or corrosive vapor. During our six weeks in Israel, as we met with groups

from opposing sides of the various divides, it became painfully clear to me that the memory of a people can be either a liberating force that transcends boundaries or a steel trap that maintains them. Very often it is both.

In short, when everybody is traumatized, nobody sees or thinks clearly. It seems that only the truly remarkable person is able to see the kinship between his or her own pain and that of the enemy. Living is no longer the pursuit of the true and the common good; living is survival. The world breaks down into good and evil people, and the only question that remains is, "Whose side are you on?"[40] At best the unfamiliar other is an object of deep cynicism; at worst, the other is inhuman, a threat to be blotted out, "not worth a Jewish fingernail." While animosity between racial and ethnic groups in the United States may not be as openly explosive as it is between the Arabs of Hebron and the Jews of Kiryat Arba, there can be no denying that "all of us who dwell in this house built on race are wounded spiritually." The problem of the color line is indeed "a beam in the eye of our global village."[41]

The Time Most Precious

"The confidence of the Christian," writes Thomas Merton, "is always a confidence in spite of darkness and risk, in the presence of peril, with every evidence of possible disaster."[42] If Thurman's context for the race question is a prayerful confidence in the all-enveloping grace of God, Copeland's horizon is the world of risk and peril facing stigmatized persons in society every day. What joins Thurman and Copeland is the realization that these two worlds are not two but one and the same: God's world, where the rain falls "on the just and the unjust" (Matt 5:45).

Just as Jesus manifests by his astonishing words and deeds that the circle of grace is closed to no one—neither to the "strutting Roman Legion" or the "little baby in his mother's arms"—so does Jesus identify himself especially with the disinherited, those thought by social consensus to be structured out of divine favor and the economy of grace. "Through incarnate love and self-sacrifice," says Copeland, "Christ makes Fatima Yusif's despised body his own. In solidarity, he shares her suffering and anguish."[43] For both Thurman and Cope-

land we are called to "a way of being in the world," a radically inclusive way, "because of who God is."[44]

In the meantime, the great disclosure who is Jesus teaches us how to live inclusively by teaching us how to live prayerfully from the Heart of God, which means not only to see and speak the truth but also to see through the eyes of understanding, empathy, and love. To see with love, of course, is a paschal option. It hurts. It takes time. It refuses blanket condemnations. It takes the time to linger not only in shadowlands and prison cells but also in courtyards where children play, in boats where fishermen work their nets, at weddings, on rocky hillsides, along garden paths, and in the foaming shoreline of the Sea of Galilee (or Lake Michigan). The cross, after all, would come soon enough!

There are gifts we cannot give to, impose upon, or steal away from anybody. What we can do is *live*, like Jesus, and be present to each other and to the earth, and thus open circles in space and time for the gifts of God to break through. White and black, brown and red, Catholic and Protestant, Christian and Jew, Hindu and Muslim—we can wait together in the quietness "for some centering moment that will redefine, reshape, and refocus our lives."

Let me conclude with another story of sunset, a precious time of day anywhere on earth. Abraham Joshua Heschel's biographer, Edward Kaplan, recalls a poignant incident in 1927 when the young Jewish student, having just arrived in Berlin to study at the university, was walking through the city's "magnificent streets" when he noticed that the sun had gone down and he suddenly realized that he had forgotten to pray. "I had forgotten God—I had forgotten Sinai—I had forgotten that sunset is my business—that my task is to 'restore the world to the kingship of the Lord.'"[45]

Twenty-five years later, having narrowly escaped the catastrophe engulfing the Jews of Europe, including the murder of his mother and three sisters, Heschel lamented still more our seeming imprisonment in the narrow confines of our own minds and the terrible costs to our humanity of being turned in upon the self. "We are rarely aware of the tangent of the beyond at the whirling wheel of experience. . . . What is extraordinary appears to us as habit, the dawn a daily routine of nature. But time and again we awake. In the midst of walking in the never-ending procession of days and nights, we are suddenly filled with a solemn terror, with a feeling of our wisdom

being inferior to dust. We cannot endure the heartbreaking splendor of sunsets."[46]

The twilight at sunset is a boundary condition, a liminal space, a fluid borderland where we delight for a while in the haunting indeterminacies of the light in-between. The life of the God-haunted, it seems to me, is much like the twilight, a strange dwelling place of in-betweens where humanity and divinity, life and death, joy and sorrow, ecstasy and despair, *commingle*, and every moment is pregnant with expectation. The great difficulty for the religious person is to live with trust, even confidence, in the beautiful but perilous twilight spaces of our pilgrimage in history. The future is not a homogenous and empty time for the believer. "Do not be afraid," the Scriptures counsel repeatedly. God is with us, and God comes passionately toward us from the future.[47]